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ABSTRACT

Recent linguistic research has focused on the actual uses or functions of language. Parallel to the development of discourse analysis, traditional language learning and teaching philosophies and methodologies have been supplemented or replaced by functional approaches, focusing on developing communicative competence, beyond strictly grammatical abilities. In the context of this relatively recent emphasis, intonation emerges as a fundamental component of the communicative process. The communicative value of a sentence cannot be determined from isolated utterances; the interpretation of its value is dependent on the interactive function of the utterance within the given discourse. Intonation is used to signal such discursal information as the speaker's awareness of knowledge shared with the listener. Integrating intonation into language instruction requires first examining the types of classroom discourse. Student and teacher utterances are restricted to certain types, and although students hear grammatically correct utterances, there is little genuine discourse with appropriate intonational patterns. The first priority in restructuring curricula to facilitate acquisition of interactive skills and intonational competence is to devise discourse situations accurately reflecting real or natural communication. Intonation should be treated not as a function of attitude or grammar but of discourse by providing systematic contrastive uses of intonation in various types of discourse situations that can be practiced, with tape recordings or computerized illustration. (ME)

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INTONATION: AN ESSENTIAL TOOL IN INTERACTIVE DISCOURSE

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INTONATION: AN ESSENTIAL TOOL IN INTERACTIVE DISCOURSE

Recent research in theoretical linguistics, as well as in foreign language pedagogy, has focused on the interactional functions of language. The further one moves towards understanding the discourse strategies used in natural language and in turn incorporating these principles in language teaching, the greater the need to account for how intonation contributes to the communicative value of utterances within a discourse. Fundamental to genuine communication is the ability not only to formulate grammatically correct utterances, but also to signal interactional strategies, such as interrupting, taking the floor, changing the subject, or concluding an argument. However, the use of intonation as a tool for achieving coherence in discourse has been virtually untreated both in theory and in practice. In this paper, I will sketch the theoretical foundations of discourse analysis and their applications in developing communicative competence in language learners. Then, based on an analysis of the discourse normally found in a language classroom, I will discuss ways in which intonation can be incorporated into foreign language instruction.

In the last ten to fifteen years, research in linguistics has focused on the actual <u>uses</u> or <u>functions</u> of language. The new goal of determining the underlying relationship between the grammatical structure of an utterance and its function in the larger discourse has broadened the scope of inquiry. It is not sufficient to specify what is grammatically acceptable, but other factors such as what is appropriate in a particular social

situation or the effect of an utterance on the interlocutor, must be taken into account. To this end, sociologists such as Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, philosophers such as Austin and Searle, and linguists such as Firth, Halliday, Sinclair and Coulthard have contributed to the theoretical foundations of discourse analysis and speech act theory, which go beyond the surface syntactic, morphological, and lexical forms in sentences and consider units larger than the sentence, entire discourses. Searle (1969), for example, in viewing the theory of language as part of a theory of action, was concerned both with the intentions and expectations of the speaker when uttering a sentence as well as with the possible or potential effect of the utterance on the hearer. Firth (1951) defined language as "a way of behaving and making others behave."

For example, a speaker may convey the desire to have a door closed by using any of the following utterances, each having a different syntactic structure:

Close the door. (IMPERATIVE)

Would you close the door? (YES-NO QUESTION)

I wonder if you'd mind closing the door. (STATEMENT)

The door is still open. (STATEMENT)

BRR, it's cold in here! (EXCLAMATION)

The unmarked form of this intended directive is the imperative, "Close the door," but also possible are a variety of marked versions, generally less direct, using interrogative, declarative, or exclamatory structures.

Parallel to the development of discourse analysis, traditional language learning and teaching philosophies and

methodologies have been supplemented or replaced by what are termed functional approaches, with a focus on developing competencies beyond strictly grammatical abilities. In other words, as Kramsch suggests, language must be viewed as a collaborative social process rather than as a product of grammatical and lexical rules. Learners must be taught not only the rules and conventions of grammar but also those governing social interaction in a particular culture and the strategies or tactics involved in the negotiation of meaning.

The object of recent focus has thus been the development of communicative competence in language learners, which encompasses four levels of capabilities. The first level, grammatical competence, is the ability to produce accurate morphological, phonological, and syntactic forms, a level not regarded as unimportant but merely one component of using language effectively. The second, sociolinguistic competence, addresses such parameters as the social status and roles of each person in a discourse situation and the knowledge of what is socially acceptable or stylistically appropriate, e.g. the sociolinguistic rules of turn-taking, interrupting, or holding the floor. Thirdly, competence in the strategic use of language is what enables a speaker to express intentions, desires, or expectations within the constraints of the syntax in a given language. The fourth level, interactive competence, is the ability of a speaker not only to convey information to a hearer but also to correctly interpret information received, and additionally to negotiate with a hearer in the event of a misunderstanding.

It is in the context of this relatively recent emphasis on

discourse analysis, and its importance to the goals of communicative language teaching, that intonation emerges as a fundamental component of the communicative process. Most previous theoretical studies of intonation tended to follow structuralist approaches, describing a finite number of pitch contours and associating these contours either with specific syntactic structures or with certain attitudinal values within single sentences. Despite the relatively extensive literature on intonation in the past 30 years, the inclusion of pedagogical applications in language syllabuses has been minimal. Intonation was not considered a critical component of language learning, as it was thought to contribute little, if anything, to the production of correct forms or sentences. A redundancy in language, it was at best icing on the cake, based on the assumptions that mastery of the syntactic structures automatically insured that a sentence would be understood as a statement or a question, and that properly chosen lexical items would adequately signal a particular attitude. However, the redundancy argument is seriously flawed, first, because intonation can be shown to provide meaning not coded in any other form, and secondly, due to the assumption that the language learner only needs to be understood and does not need to understand intonational contrasts made by native speakers.

Just as in the examples regarding door-closing, where there is not a one-to-one relationship between the syntactic structure of an utterance and its function in discourse, so also is there no one-to-one correspondence between intonational patterns and grammatical structures. Any of a host of intonational patterns

are possible for each of the door-closing utterances, depending on the intent or expectations of the speaker, the social status of the speaker in relationship to the interlocutor, and the surrounding discourse or pragmatic context, (e.g. the degree of politeness or the necessity to be polite).

Thus, it is evident that the communicative value of a sentence cannot be determined by examining isolated utterances; the interpretation of its value is dependent on the interactive function of the utterance within the given discourse. Intonation is used to signal such discoursal information as awareness by the speaker of the varied types of knowledge shared with the hearer, whether it be common linguistic or cultural ground or simply knowledge of the world (e.g. "The door is still open" implies that an earlier request or attempt to close the door had taken place). Or consider that a sarcastic utterance, for instance, may syntactically be a yes-no question, "Isn't that nice?!", but with falling intonation, signals that the opposite meaning is intended.

The first step in integrating intonation into language instruction is to examine closely the types of discourse actually used in the classroom. Inherent in this learning situation is the fact that the language being taught is both the medium of instruction as well as the object to be learned; this proves to be a drawback in that much of what transpires in the classroom would not be considered natural discourse.

Students' utterances are generally restricted to the illocutionary acts of reading aloud, repeating, informing, and responding to questions or imperatives from the teacher. On the

other hand, teachers use a much wider range of communicative functions, e.g. addressing others, selecting the next speaker, choosing the topic, interrupting, changing the subject, and concluding a discussion. (Kramsch) However, the majority of teachers' utterances are very likely to be interrogatives, and furthermore, usually not genuine requests for information. Rather, they are frequently designed to elicit a pre-determined response for the purpose of drilling a particular grammatical item or for checking comprehension. With each successive repetition of the question, its credibility as a true interrogative diminishes, and by the second or third round of questioning, the intonation used by the teacher is often statement-like, with falling or low termination. Conversely, students, if unsure of their responses, will use high or rising terminal contours with statements, as they are genuinely seeking confirmation or an evaluation of their reply.

Thus, despite the fact that learners hear grammatically correct utterances from the teachers, they are precluded from exposure to genuine discourse and the appropriate intonational patterns. Since most of the exchanges in the classroom are unnatural from a discourse standpoint and unequal sociolinguistically, learners are given neither the privilege of discourse management nor the opportunity to acquire such competence.

In restructuring the curriculum to facilitate the acquisition of interactive skills in general and of intonational competence in particular, the first priority is to devise discourse situations which more accurately reflect real or natural

communication, and the second, to treat intonation not as a function of grammar or attitude but as a function of discourse, by providing systematic contrastive uses of intonation in discourse which can be practiced.

These principles can be applied in the earliest stages of language instruction. Even the most basic materials can be designed to go beyond the simple grammatical distinctions of declarative statements and wh- or yes-no questions. In most textbooks, an overwhelming percentage of exercises consist of unrelated statements which must be manipulated toward a specific grammatical end; more desirable are discourse situations into which a variety of syntactic structures, and whenever possible, different speech acts, are incorporated, each in pursuit of some interactive purpose. A very simplistic exchange, such as the following, involves 4 persons:

A: Wie finden Sie dieses Buch? (WH-question)

B: Ich finde es langweilig. (Statement)

C: Wie bitte? Du findest es langweilig? (Echo question)

B: Ja. Ihr nicht? (Statement, fragmented question)

D: Also, er findet es langweilig, aber <u>ich</u> finde es grossartig!

Although the exchange contains a minimum of vocabulary and syntactic difficulty, questions are posed, information sought, responses given, opinions stated and challenged, and a differing opinion offered. With the necessary surrounding context, the various stress and intonational patterns can be contrasted with one another and correlated with their discourse functions.

Kramsch (1981 & 1983) has developed excellent materials for

more advanced levels of instruction which require the use of various 'gambits' or conversational strategies in extensive role-playing situations. She provides thorough suggestions for how these may be practiced in the classroom and urges that they be taught "with the proper intonation." While the existence of such materials already alleviates the first part of our task, the next step is to expand on these with an explicit focus on intonation.

For example, in teaching students how to interrupt another speaker, to ask for clarification, or to take the initiative in a discussion, Kramsch suggests the following phrases: Moment mal!, Also, pass auf!, Darf ich kurz was fragen?, Wie meinst du das?, Ich möchte was sagen... Various ways of staging this in the classroom are suggested: in one exercise, the instructor begins speaking on a topic and each student must at some point interrupt; or in another exercise, a fellow student is given the floor and must be interrupted by each of the other students. The learners must be made aware both of the sociolinguistic options related to politeness, as well as of the intonational forms that may be appropriate. If the phrase Moment mal!, followed by a request for clarification such as WAS haben Sie gesagt?, were intended as a polite interruption of the instructor, high intonation with a sustained terminal contour would be preferred to the less polite--and perhaps exasperated--interruption of a fellow student, Moment mal! Das kannst du doch nicht sagen! The critical elements in these examples are the attempts at natural discourse and at using language and intonation to negotiate a message.

In conclusion, let me briefly outline additional possibilities for incorporating the teaching of discourse in the foreign language classroom. Tape recordings can be made of the types of discourse situations and exchanges suggested by Kramsch, consisting of either natural discourse or of pedagogically designed dialogues. As a preliminary or supplementary exercise, students are asked to listen to these recordings with particular attention to the intonation used by the speakers for achieving certain discourse effects or eliciting particular responses from their discourse partners. Similar exercises are subsequently practiced extensively in the classroom. A further source of aid to the learning of intonation is yet to be tapped in the rapidly developing new technology of pitch extracting devices connected to computers, which in turn display the linear melodic curves on a screen. As one line of research, I intend to pursue the instrumental research developed by linguists such as James (at the University of Toronto), whereby model intonational patterns are shown to learners, who then attempt to match their patterns to the native speakers'. Critical for the use and applications of all of these various tools and materials is that the discourse function is the determining factor for which intonational contour is selected, practiced, and ultimately mastered.

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